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INSIGHT: Making the Most of Motion for Well-Being at Work

By Krista Logelin



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Get up and move—movement at work and in our daily lives plays a huge role in mental and physical well-being. Krista Logelin, director of employee well-being at Morgan Lewis, offers tips on how individuals and organizations can incorporate movement at work to fight depression and help employees flourish.

Let us begin with a short philosophy lesson: Plato, according to history, said, “In order for man to succeed in life, god provided him with two means, education and physical activity. Not separately, one for the soul and the other for the body, but for the two together.”

People have long understood the power of movement when it comes to flourishing. We know that exercise improves our physical health. But what about the less talked about

benefits of exercise that can have a major impact on our ability to thrive at work and in life, as Plato recognized?

In the occupational domain of well-being, aerobic exercise produces many desirable outcomes, such as fewer sick days, increased energy and productivity, less stress, and more satisfaction with our work output.

In addition to these work benefits, exercise pays tremendous rewards for our mental health. When it comes to anxiety (especially the everyday kind that we all experience), exercise helps by relaxing our muscles, breaking down immobilization, and building brain resources. Further, it combats depression through the release of endorphins. Elle Woods had it right when she said, "Exercise gives you endorphins. Endorphins make you happy."

It does not stop at the increased production of these happy hormones. Exercise also works to fight depression by elevating levels of other mood-boosting neurotransmitters, such as norepinephrine, serotonin, and dopamine.

Finding the Time

How can busy legal professionals best leverage movement as a well-being tool? Start small; any amount of movement can have a benefit, whether it be one minute, 10 minutes, or 60 minutes. Of course, the longer and more regularly a person moves, the more substantial the results will be. Nevertheless, taking even a few minutes to exercise produces, even if for a short term, brain-changing benefits.

What time can you reclaim from your routine for more movement? Take a walking meeting. Stand up and actually go to a colleague's desk instead of emailing the person.

To give a personal example, I made my commute part of my movement routine by biking to work, reclaiming time I would have otherwise spent sitting in a car or on the train. I even reclaim the few minutes I spend brushing my teeth each day by doing calf raises while I brush. It really can be that small! The cumulative effect of these minor adjustments can add up to produce large results.

Find what works best for you and make the most of it. In order to maximize your effort, consider ways you can capitalize on your fitness activities to have an impact on other domains of well-being. Move with a colleague (which improves occupational well-being), in nature (emotional well-being), in new places (intellectual well-being), for a cause (community well-being), or in new ways (intellectual well-being).

Organizations Play a Role

Organizations have a role in encouraging their personnel to become more active. Morgan Lewis offers a variety of firm events and activities, such as meditation classes, step challenges, and sports teams, and charity runs to inspire people to keep moving. Our Dubai office hosts a monthly 30x30 fitness challenge that encourages members to exercise for 30 minutes a day for 30 days, while our Washington, D.C., office's lawyer and staff softball team has been on an extended winning streak. In San Francisco, many of our folks participate in regular yoga breaks.

The point is that our community around the globe finds varied and engaging ways to incorporate a focus on movement into their workplaces.

That leads to one final word of advice: There is no one-size-fits-all approach to well-being, including movement. People need to find what works best for them as the unique individuals they are. This goes for each team and each organization, as well.

Finding that happy place might require some trial and error, it will most likely involve a variety of efforts and initiatives in order to meet the variety of needs present in the specific community. In the end, doing so will most certainly have a positive impact on the organization, its people, and its clientele.

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